1. Emotional Inheritance in the Formation of Attitudes

Introduction

As the years have passed—and I do not mean only the years lived, but also the years learnt—I have come to understand something I once only intuited: childhood leaves deep marks, sometimes invisible, that shape the way we feel, think, and dwell in the world.

Anyone who has had the privilege—and also the challenge—of raising a child knows that accompanying their growth is not a simple task: it is an intimate journey, at times painful, often luminous, that transforms us as much as it transforms them.

I too was once a guided child, observed, loved in my own way. And though many things have changed, I know I still carry within me the voices, the gestures, the silences of my parents. Marks from that time still accompany me today, like a gentle melody that resonates without the need for words.

The Challenging Art of Raising a Child

Raising is not only caring: it is walking alongside another being who is learning to inhabit the world.

Every generation faces its own dilemmas. Comparisons between yesterday's upbringing and today's often do not do justice to the complexities of each era. Although the purpose has always been to form whole human beings, the paths to reach that goal have been diverse.

In my home there was affectionate discipline, where words had their place. But I have also learnt to value more structured approaches. There is no single formula. Everything depends on the child, the moment, the bond.

Science seems to confirm what many intuitive parents already know: firm love and authentic communication nurture a child's soul. A Harvard study revealed that children raised with respect and

dialogue develop greater social and emotional skills. My personal story could not illustrate it better.

The Emotional Inheritance We Carry

Psychotherapist Galit Atlas has shed light on a truth many of us feel without being able to name it: we do not only inherit physical traits or customs, but also unresolved emotions. Traumas left unspoken, griefs unwept, fears hidden away… all of it, in some way, reaches the children.

I too have felt, in my own body and gaze, the worries of my parents. Sometimes, without them knowing it, the echo of their experiences became my inner voice.

The fear a mother once felt in her childhood may reappear as overprotection. The pain a father could not name may return as distance. Understanding this invisible inheritance was, for me, an act of liberation. Naming it, confronting it, and transforming it allowed me to begin writing my own story.

Clarifying Our Purposes

Being a parent is not about imposing dreams, but about accompanying the building of their own. But that is not always easy.

We have all felt frustration when our children do not act as we expected. Sometimes they refuse to eat, other times they challenge our rules. Those moments test us.

I remember how my parents, with patience and creativity, made me a participant in the kitchen. That strengthened our bond and, without my noticing, taught me healthy habits. Today I know that involving a child in the small tasks of the home can open great paths.

A study in the Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior supports this experience: when children help prepare food, they are also nourishing their curiosity and openness to what is healthy. I was one of those children.

Honouring Autonomy

Over the years, I learnt something essential: we cannot control the destiny of our children, but we can accompany it with respect.

Guiding is not the same as directing. And loving, in its noblest form, is also letting be.

My parents knew how to respect my inclinations, even when they did not coincide with theirs. They gave me freedom to explore my passions, and that strengthened my confidence. I will never forget how my choice of paths different from those expected was met with support, not reproach.

Researchers at Stanford have shown that when people feel their decisions come from within, they are more motivated and happier. I did not need to read it in a study: I lived it.

Emotions along the Way

Raising a child is an emotional journey. There are days of pure joy and others of silent anguish.

We want the best for our children, but sometimes that desire disguises itself as pressure. Without realising it, we may smother their spontaneity or feed their insecurities.

I remember how, at times, academic expectations in my home created a climate of tension. But then something shifted. My parents began to trust me more than my grades. And that trust—so silent, so firm—helped me flourish.

Studies from the American Psychological Association confirm what the heart already knows: children who grow up surrounded by emotional support develop stronger self-esteem and more stable mental health. I am living proof of that.

Conclusion

Every story begins in childhood. And although we cannot rewrite the past, we can reinterpret it with greater compassion and clarity.

Today, as an adult, I know that raising children is a continuous act of reflection, humility, and presence. It is not about doing it perfectly, but about doing it with love.

In the end, what truly leaves a mark on a child is not our achievements or our theories, but the way we look at them, listen to them, and accompany them on their journey.

To educate is not to form a copy of ourselves, but to help the other discover their own light.

References

Atlas, G. (2021). Emotional Inheritance: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Intergenerational Trauma. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Baumrind, D. (1971). Current patterns of parental authority. Developmental Psychology Monograph, 4(1, Pt. 2), 1–103.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. Psychological Inquiry, 11(4), 227-268.

Nanney, M. S., Johnson, S., Elliott, M., & Haire-Joshu, D. (2007). The frequency of eating homegrown produce is associated with higher intake amongst parents and their preschool-aged children in rural Missouri. Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior, 39(2), 65-69.

Pomerantz, E. M., Grolnick, W. S., & Price, C. E. (2007). The role of parents in how children approach achievement: A dynamic process perspective. In A. J. Elliot & C. S. Dweck (Eds.), Handbook of competence and motivation (pp. 259-278). New York, NY: Guilford Press.